BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Education Report

New Legislation Poised to Improve Education

Government introduced three new education-themed bills last week: Bill 20, Bill 21 and Bill 22.

Bill 20 — Student Achievement

New legislation makes school boards more accountable for student results, provides students and parents with more choice, and increases support to school districts.

District superintendents will be responsible for student achievement and district accountability contracts will be replaced by achievement contracts in which boards set specific goals for student achievement, including Aboriginal students.

To help boards reach their goals, new provincial superintendents of achievement will support districts and develop their leadership.

School boards will be renamed "boards of education" to reflect a new broader mandate that includes early learning and requires they develop district literacy plans.

Parents will have another avenue of appeal. In some circumstances, they may ask the superintendents of achievement to look at board rulings.

Finally, the minister can now consider provincial demonstration schools to provide students and parents with even more choice and to develop educational practices that will benefit schools throughout the province. Read more.

Bill 20 — School Fees

New legislation allows school districts to charge fees for some courses and materials.

Fees can defray the non-instructional costs of specialty academies. Boards must have the approval of the school planning council, which must consult with parents. The board and council must annually approve any fees.

Boards can also charge fees to defray costs that are in addition to providing a regular education program. This includes the rental or purchase of musical instruments, and tools, materials and equipment for trades training or apprenticeship programs.

Boards cannot charge fees for educational resource materials necessary to participate in an educational program, and boards will be required to have a policy in place to include students for whom the fees may be a financial hardship.

This new legislation gives boards the tools they need to offer students and parents choice and access to programs that might otherwise have been cancelled. Read more.

Bill 21 — Teacher Discipline Registry

New legislation will lead to a public online registry that will include the names of disciplined teachers, the status and history of their certificates, and records of disciplinary action taken by the B.C. College of Teachers when the discipline relates to physical, sexual or emotional harm to a student.

The college must also create an employment registry available to any board, authority or band that is considering employing a college member.

To help protect students, boards must provide the college with the names of any college members employed during the previous year and report to the college any time it dismisses or disciplines a member for misconduct that involves physical, sexual or emotional abuse. The responsibility to report is with the superintendent of schools.

The Inspector of Independent Schools will be required to establish parallel discipline and teacher employment registries. Read more.

Bill 22 — Codes of conduct

New legislation will require all B.C. boards to establish codes of conduct to help prevent bullying and harassment. Codes must meet provincial standards set by the Ministry of Education. This will help make classrooms safer for students and staff.

The legislation also makes school district business companies more accountable. The majority of directors must be at arm's length from the board. Companies must appoint auditors, prepare financial statements, and list transactions between the business company and the board in audited financial statements. Similarly, companies must make June 30 their fiscal year end, issue annual reports, and hold annual general meetings that are open to the public.

Bill 22 also contains provisions that enable the Province to communicate directly with teachers. This builds on direct communications already taking place through the annual teachers' congress, the Learning Roundtable and visits by Premier Gordon Campbell and Minister Bond to school districts.

Other legislative amendments include allowing additional uses of personal education numbers and partially reimbursing students for expenses incurred in earning external credential or post-secondary credit. Read more.

Message from Minister Shirley Bond

Minister of Education Shirley Bond

Last week was a wonderful celebration of excellence in B.C.'s education system, and we should all be extremely proud of the work that goes on in our classrooms.

B.C. students are among the best in the world. On a 2003 international test for 15-year-olds, no country performed better than B.C. in math and reading. And only Alberta scored higher than B.C. on the 2004 Student Achievement Indicators Program science tests for 13- and 16-year-old students.

However, I'm concerned that in recent years results have levelled off and, in some cases, even declined. We know that every year more than 11,000 students do not graduate. Equally challenging is the fact that nearly 9,000 children a year – or one in four B.C. children – start kindergarten without the developmental skills needed to succeed.

It's clear we cannot continue to do the things the way we have always done them and expect to get different results.

It's time for positive change. That's why, over the course of this last week, Education Week in B.C., our government introduced new legislation to help improve student achievement.

This special edition of the Education Report summarizes that legislation because I want everyone involved in our education system to seize this opportunity to work together and make B.C. the best educated, most literate jurisdiction in North America.